

Dentist and Dental Specialist		Victoria
ANZSCO Code: 2523-11, 12		June 2009
Labour market rating:	No shortage	
Comment: <i>Private and/or metropolitan dental services appear to be adequately supplied to meet underlying demand whereas public and/or rural services experience difficulty</i>		

Occupational demand

Dentists diagnose and treat teeth and gums, undertake preventative procedures and conduct surgery. Dental specialists are experts in their field of dentistry and provide patients with highly complex dental treatment. Dentists normally require a five year Bachelor of Dental Science degree and specialists require an additional three year Masters in Dental Science. Both must be registered with the Dental Practice Board of Victoria. Dental services are provided from private practice and public dental clinics and demand is broadly in line with the population growth rate.

Occupational supply

The number of dentists practicing in Victoria has risen due to a number of factors. Net migration into Victoria has increased every year for each of the last 4 years; 146 practitioners entered Victoria in 2007-08 which was double that recorded in 2004-05. Tempering this trend, as the proportion of migrants sourced from countries other than New Zealand and Great Britain has declined, the pass rate in the required examinations has declined to less than 50 per cent.

The number of university graduates has also increased over time with 88 persons completing the bachelor degree in 2007. The number of registrants from this cohort will be somewhat less due to international students who will not take up residency. In the largest dental school in the state 34 per cent of enrolled students were international students.

Dental registration board data show that in the period 2002-08 the number of dentists increased by over 14 per cent and the number of dental specialists increased by over 22 per cent; in 2008 there were 2542 registered dentists and 360 dental specialists. A complicating factor is that the distribution of dentists across the state is uneven. 2006 ABS Census data show there were 43.5 dentists (both public and private practice) per 100 000 population but that the rate across Victoria varied from less than 7 per 100 000 population in one rural region to over 24 per 100 000 in a metropolitan region. This indicates that, rather than a skills shortage, there is a maldistribution of dentists. Data on the working hours of dentists show a neutral relationship between the per capita incidence of dentists and hours worked. Thus in regions where the distribution of dentists is below the average, underlying demand for dental services may not be met with increased hours of practice.

One study found that a large proportion of dental graduates initially chose to work in the public sector and rural areas on graduation, primarily as a means of consolidating their clinical skills. However same study also found the retention rate declines rapidly with time with only 10 per cent still working in the public sector and only 20 per cent still working in rural areas when both were measured 3 years later. The Victoria state government has funded several initiatives to address distribution issues including scholarships for students to pursue a career in public clinics and rural public clinics.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

This SERA found that 100 per cent of surveyed vacancies were filled with 3.5 suitable applicants per vacancy. Anecdotal evidence from some survey respondents supported other data indicating there is a maldistribution of dentists across the state where an underlying unmet demand for dental services exists in some regions but this unmet demand is expressed in prolonged waiting lists rather than as vacancies and is therefore not revealed in the survey data itself.

Labour market outlook

The labour market rating is not expected to change over the outlook period.